



Lynn Schindler

4th District State Representative

2004 Session Wrap-up

Dear friends,

The 2004 legislative session has come to a close. It was a short session, but a busy one full of issues that will have a very direct impact on those of us here in the 4th District.

I am happy to report that children in our state were the winners this year, with passage of legislation to improve the WASL test, help underachieving students and get tougher on child molesters. We also helped families by continuing job-creating incentives and winning funding to increase safety on one of our area's most dangerous roads.

At the same time, however, legislators left Olympia without solutions to some of the state's most pressing problems, including liability reform and authorizing affordable insurance plans for small employers.

Overall, the 2004 session was one of important victories for families, kids and small employers, and, in the end, a long list of issues the Legislature will need to take up again next year.

I thank you for the honor of serving as your legislator. If you have any questions, have an idea for a bill or need help working with a state agency, please contact me. **I am here to serve you.**

Sincerely,

Rep. Lynn Schindler

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Committees:

- Local Government,
Ranking Republican member
- Transportation

Representative *Lynn* Schindler

Legislation that helps kids



Kids were the winners this legislative session with passage of two important bills. One was a bill to give students, parents and educators more flexibility with the **Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) test**. Among other positive changes, schools must now allow for retakes, require clear achievement standards, and help underachieving students.

Another important win this year is a measure that will **impose tougher sentences against child sex predators**. The bill, as House Republicans originally proposed it, would have implemented mandatory sentences for child sex offenders and kept them from avoiding jail time by entering an alternative treatment program. As passed, the bill does make it tougher on these criminals but doesn't go nearly as far as the original bill intended. Next year I believe the Legislature should take the issue up again and make sure sex predators serve time for their crimes.

Local legislation

The Legislature passed several bills this year that will have a direct, positive impact on people in the 4th District. Here are a few of them:

- The drive along **Bigelow Gulch** between Spokane Valley and the city's north side will be safer because of funding we secured to widen part of the road to four lanes with eight-foot shoulders on each side of the roadway. As a member of the House Transportation Committee, getting this project funded was one of my top legislative priorities. I was proud to sponsor the idea and

very pleased to get it into the final supplemental transportation budget.

- Employers and people seeking jobs in the high-tech industry will benefit from a bill we passed to continue tax incentives for **high technology businesses that locate and grow** in Washington. Since each high-tech or biotech job creates as many as 3.4 additional jobs, this will have a big impact on our local economy.
- Employers that want to **challenge state rules and regulations** will have an easier time of it thanks to a bill we passed that will let them challenge those rules in Spokane County court, rather than making them drive to Thurston County court in Olympia.



What did we leave on the table?

The Legislature left Olympia without resolving some of the state's pressing issues. Here are some of those important items that I believe the Legislature should take up again next year:

- Authorizing **affordable insurance plans** for small employers.
- Making sweeping changes to Washington's **workers' compensation system**, including simplifying rate calculations and controlling rising rates. California just enacted major reforms, and Washington should be able to do it, too.
- Requiring **parents be notified** when minors seek an abortion. Many of you have contacted me in support of the idea that parents – who know their child's medical and psychological history better than anyone – should be part of any discussion involving this type of major surgery. Although the bill did not make it to the House floor for a vote, that doesn't preclude us from introducing it again next year.
- **Limiting state agencies' rule-making authority** and placing the burden of proof on the agency's shoulders, not employers'.

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Tort reform

Did you know the state's medical association reports a 31 percent increase in the number of **doctors leaving Washington**? That **specialty-care doctors**, such as neurosurgeons, are becoming **harder to find**? That some rural hospitals **no longer deliver babies**, forcing mothers to drive hours for a delivery? This is happening because higher and higher "pain and suffering" awards are forcing up liability insurance premiums for *all* medical providers – even those with no claims. A typical obstetricians' malpractice coverage has risen from around \$45,000 in 2000 to about

\$72,000 today. And the trend isn't limited to medical providers. Small employers are also watching their liability insurance premiums soar, forcing them to cut

jobs or close their doors. We all ultimately bear the brunt of this problem in the form of lower wages, fewer jobs, higher insurance premiums, more expensive goods and reduced access to health care.

This year House Republicans introduced bills to stop this dangerous trend, including a plan to put a reasonable limit on the pain and suffering portion of jury awards. These ideas, already working in other states, would have kept doctors in practice and helped employers create new jobs. ***None of those proposals would have limited a person's ability to sue or the amount anyone could collect for medical costs, costs related to care, or future wages with raises.***

Unfortunately, House Democrats stopped any such measures before we could vote on them. Instead, they proposed incremental changes that fell far short of the bold changes we need, and in the end the Legislature approved little that will get us out of this crisis. This is an issue that is already personally touching us all, and it's one the Legislature simply must address next year.



The budget: better than expected, but still too big

This session Gov. Locke and House members from the other side of the aisle proposed a risky supplemental operating budget that raised spending and left a paltry \$199 million – less than 1 percent – in the state's reserves. I believed this was an irresponsible approach toward planning Washington's future and left citizens unprotected in the event of a natural disaster or another economic downturn.

The Senate's version of the budget left more in reserves, but still proposed spending more than the state was bringing in. In the end, the compromise budget leaves \$278 million in reserves, but **boosts spending for 2003-05 operations by almost \$165 million.**

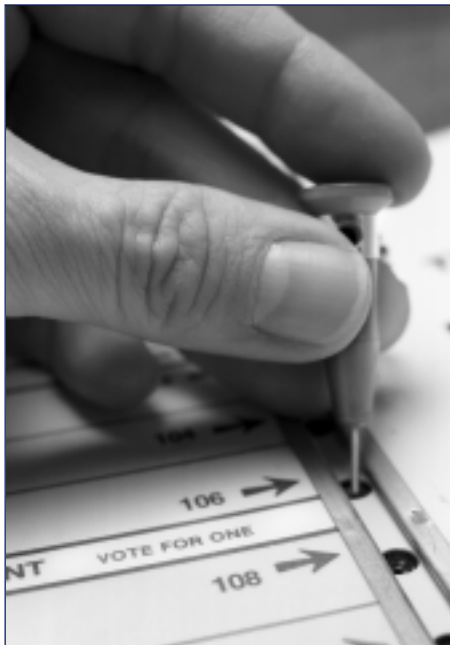
A big part of that increase went toward our state's colleges and universities, which is important. But I was disappointed to see the Legislature and governor overlook Spokane-area projects that would have generated jobs and investment in our region. This additional spending also puts our state back into the same financial hole we dug out of during the 2003 session. Lawmakers will face a projected \$1 billion budget shortfall in January 2005 and will likely be forced to cut core services or implement a massive tax increase – or both. We should be very careful with our spending, especially now as our economy struggles to recover, and get back to the principle of **living within our means.**



Rep Schindler garnered support for Bigelow Gulch Road improvements

Representative *Lynn* Schindler

A new election for Washington state



Last year the Supreme Court declared Washington's blanket primary election unconstitutional, leaving the Legislature to choose a new primary. Our main goals were **protecting voters' choice, privacy and independence.**

The plan that passed was one to advance the top two primary vote getters to the general election, regardless of party. It also contained backup language to revert to a Montana-style primary should the "top two" idea not stand.

The Governor vetoed the "top two" idea and chose the Montana-style primary for Washington. Under the new system voters will not be required to register with a political party and their names will not go onto a party list. They will, however, be required to choose the ballot of one party for primary voting.

If you have questions about the primary please call my office at (360) 786-7984.

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